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SUBJECT: PROGRESS OF USG HIV/AIDS PROGRAM IN LESOTHO

Summary

1. USG Programs in the Kingdom of Lesotho, a non-'focus' country under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), are reaping recognition from Basotho governmental and non-governmental corners. The extensive interaction of the HIV/AIDS Coordinator with local entities, continued public outreach by the Ambassador and senior level visitors, and specific USAID, CDC, Peace Corps, DOL and DOD programs coupled with the growing presence of U.S. universities have resulted in excellent media coverage and supportive public statements. As USG regional and in-country teams craft next year's plan, they do so in an atmosphere of increasing public and private awareness. End Summary.

2. The on-the-ground activities of post's HIV/AIDS Coordinator and Ambassador's leadership position on the UN's Expanded HIV/AIDS Theme Group are being recognized in feedback from local organizations, the Minister of Health, and the media. Coordinator Joan Atkinson has brought together all U.S. organizations in partnership with PVOs and who are working with the technical teams of the GoL. As the U.S. representative on the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) for the Global Fund grants, the Coordinator played a major role in drafting the country's response to the Global Fund in early 2006. As a result of this response, threatened cutoffs of funding never materialized and the GOL's Minister of Health has repeatedly thanked the U.S. Ambassador for support since his thinly-staffed agency relied so heavily on U.S. expertise.

3. USD\$7 million of PEPFAR funding has allowed a rapid scale-up of USAID, CDC and Peace Corps funded programs:

X A pre-small grants workshop directed towards local organizations and managed by USAID through PACT drew representatives of nearly 100 community-based organizations to Maseru. Technical reviews of grant applications have resulted in grant agreements with 9 organizations to date, with grants ranging from USD\$65,000 to USD\$300,000.

X In January 2006 over 500 youth between the ages of 11 to 24 years participated in a highly successful three day, "Life Affirming Youth Sports Camp" organized by Peace Corps. The camps integrated HIV prevention messages with recreational activities.

X PMTCT+ 'Site Readiness' appraisals followed by dissemination workshops have been conducted at 3 major health care facilities in Lesotho. The appraisals were conducted by Columbia University together with the Academy for Educational Development and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Foundation who have formed the Partnership for Family Centered HIV Programs (PFHP) in order to scale-up PMTCT+ services at these 3 sites.

X With USG support a Technical Advisor has been hired to assist

the National TB Program with GFATM grant implementation and with the process of integrating TB & HIV services in 4 pilot districts. A second Senior HCT/TB/HIV Advisor is in the process of being identified.

X With the assistance of the USAID Capacity Project, human resource managers with the MOHSW are being assisted to develop operational plans for their department. This is part of a larger effort to assist in the implementation of Lesotho's Human Resources Strategic Plan for health.

X USG HIV/AIDS funding is providing the assistance of an architectural firm as well as a health consultant to assist in preparing a proposal to the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The proposal will include basic infrastructural needs (clinic upgrades & renovations, blood transfusion centers, dorms. etc.) as well as address the shortage of health care workers in Lesotho.

X USG funding will strengthen the national 'Know Your Status' campaign through continued support for stand-alone VCT sites as well as by initiating a new program that will improve the quality of VCT in existing health facilities.

X The USG is working with the Global Fund CCM to access Technical Assistance funds to assist in implementation of Global Fund grants made available for this purpose by Ambassador Tobias.

14. The March visit of DOD's Technical Support Manager Dr. Anne Thomas highlighted the interest in PMTCT training for the Lesotho Defense Force and civilian institutions. Her tour of the Military Hospital garnered extensive local/regional coverage and encouraged HIV testing and treatment of personnel. The Commander of the LDF publicly thanked the USG for its past and

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present contributions to controlling the spread of AIDS.

15. During an April 11 presentation to all donors, Lesotho's Finance Minister praised USG contributions and those of private U.S. organizations in the nation's fight against HIV/AIDS. The Minister has also requested specific information on USG programs that can be incorporated into publications the GoL produces. Embassy and interagency personnel expect to be involved over the coming weeks in consultations with donors, Baylor College of Medicine and Boston University's Medical Center to chart future directions. The Ambassador, the EU head of delegation and the UNICEF director met in March with the new chair of Lesotho's National AIDS Commission (NAC) Board to identify areas where donors can help strengthen the NAC's umbrella role, one we view as essential to continued forward movement.
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